

HOW MANY POETS DOES IT TAKE ...

Eating lunch in the computer room, I'm interrupted by Charles Webb coming in to work on his NEA application. After tapping away for a few minutes, I hear him fiddle with the printer.

"The printer won't print," he says. "Someone must have messed with it, because I printed something yesterday."

"It wouldn't surprise me," I reply, and it doesn't. The lab is frequented by faculty and grad students notorious for leaving their work on the computer and crowding the already strained hard drive.

I tell Charles I'd call the computer techs to fix it.

Later that day, another faculty member has problems with the printer, so I sit with her at the Mac to see what I can do. I click the spinning globe, then Print Manager, and suddenly the printer comes alive. The woman reads the printouts: Webb's NEA poems.

The first word I see is penis.

The second is the f-word.

I remember Charles asking the printer for the obligatory five copies of the eight pages of poetry, and I listen to the printer spew out the backlogged requests. I leave the instructor with the printer and probably Webb's most kick-ass work.

I imagine her reading every poem (who wouldn't?)

I imagine her blushing as she tosses the forty blistering pages into the recycling bin.

I imagine the grungy Recycling Center students performing a cartoon double-take at Webb's work, reading it with their buddies at lunch.

I imagine a poem or two xeroxed and passed around at parties.

I imagine one of the kids adopting a poem into a song for his band, recording it on a cheap demo immediately bootlegged by eager fans.

I imagine the band making it big, nominated for a Grammy, the song heavily rotated on MTV.

I imagine Tipper Gore having a stroke when she hears it.

I imagine Charles having a stroke when he discovers that his poem has been stolen.

I imagine the lawsuits, the interviews on Oprah, the exclusive biographies.

I imagine the newly discovered secret tapes,
the embarrassed NEA Chairman, the toppling
of the Presidency over WebbGate.

Wandering back to my own computer (the screen
filled with the safe words of the department
newsletter, the harmless figures of the Fall
semester's database), I wonder if I should tell
Charles about his impending fame, the notorious
references in future history books.

No, I won't say anything.
Let him be surprised.

— Glenn Bach

Huntington Beach CA

A REFUSAL TO MOURN A BAD HAIRCUT

Physics assures us matter cannot be destroyed.
The sequoia crashing to the ground
becomes a field of toadstools leaping up.
The Thanksgiving feast Grandma slaved over
becomes a stink-pile, which becomes dinner again.

I'm sad that Shawn at Super Cuts lopped off
a half-foot of your hair, that scented river
where I loved to lay my head and drift. A hundred
brush-strokes a day for a full year — plus nightly
washing and papaya rinses — molds in the trash tonight.

But hair is protein. And flesh is protein too.
Six inches of protein have fallen, true.
Yet see the power of your naked beauty
to make an equal length of protein rise?
Lie down with me, sweet love, I give you back your hair.

WITH HEAD HELD HIGH

"It's not embarrassing. Somebody has to win; somebody
has to lose. I just happened to lose."

— New York Mets Pitcher Anthony Young, after
breaking the Major League record for con-
secutive losses.

Somebody has to get it up, somebody has to be flaccid;
I just happened to be flaccid.